

Internship: Animal Assisted Therapy and Psychology with Horses and Dogs

Trauma-Informed, Somatic Work and Nervous System Regulation

Summer Semester 2026 | Winter Semester 2026/2027 | Summer Semester 2027

Internships possible from a minimum stay of 2 weeks

This internship offers students the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in animal assisted psychological work, with a primary focus on horses and dogs. The program integrates trauma-informed, somatic and nervous system-based approaches in an international learning environment.

The internship combines applied psychology, experiential learning with animals, and innovative approaches at the intersection of neuroscience, human–animal interaction and personal development.

A key focus of the work is exploring how co-regulation through animals can influence the human nervous system, and how somatic awareness and body-based practices can support psychological wellbeing and resilience.

Who this internship is for:

This internship is suitable for students from Psychology and a range of related fields, especially those interested in trauma-informed work, somatic approaches, and human–animal interaction.

Eligible study programs may include:

- Psychology
- Social Work / Social Pedagogy
- Education / Pedagogy
- Neuroscience / Cognitive Science
- Occupational Therapy / Rehabilitation Sciences
- Human–Animal Interaction / Anthrozoology / Animal Studies
- Sport Science / Movement Science / Somatic Studies
- Anthropology or related fields

Focus areas

This internship is especially relevant for students who want to explore:

animal assisted therapy and psychology in applied contexts

trauma-informed and nervous system-based approaches

somatic and body-based practices for regulation, awareness, and emotional processing

human–animal interaction and co-regulation, with horses and dogs as the primary partner species

What you will learn and experience

During the internship students gain insights into different aspects of animal assisted psychological work:

experiential learning with horses in personal development and therapeutic contexts

foundations of human–animal interaction from a psychological perspective

introduction to somatic approaches and nervous system regulation in the presence of animals

observation and documentation of animal assisted sessions

participation in exercises focused on mindfulness, emotional regulation and body awareness

project-based work in the field of animal assisted interventions and innovation

involvement in the development of AI-supported tools designed to deepen learning and reflection in animal assisted programs

insights into research activities such as investigating changes in heart rate variability (HRV) in interaction with horses

support with communication and social media around psychology-based projects

Academic supervision

The internship is supervised by a Diplom-Psychologist with experience in trauma-informed work, somatic approaches and human–animal interaction. Regular reflection and learning guidance are part of the internship structure.

Location

The internship takes place at an equestrian facility in the Algarve, Portugal, around 40 minutes from Faro airport.

Optional accommodation

Optional accommodation is available for interns in a shared international villa directly next to the equestrian facility.

- villa with private pool
- located about 1.5 km from the beaches of the Algarve
- beaches and the sea are within walking distance
- shops and local amenities nearby

Cost for accommodation: 870 € per month

Internship bonus: Living and learning at the Algarve, Portugal

Besides the internship experience, participants can enjoy a variety of leisure activities offered in the area as well as enjoying the local area:

- beaches and the ocean within walking distance
- beginner surf lessons
- boat trips with dolphin and whale watching

- an international environment with students from different European universities

Funding opportunities

For internships of 2–3 months, funding through Erasmus+ or similar national mobility programs may be possible.

Examples:

Erasmus+: approx. 750 € per month plus travel support

Switzerland (SEMP): approx. 450 CHF per month

Optional research opportunity

Preparations are currently underway for a larger research initiative in the context of European collaboration projects (e.g. Horizon Europe). Within this context students may have the opportunity to connect a Bachelor or Master thesis to the internship and participate in exploratory research on animal assisted interventions.

Possible topics include group-based equine-assisted programs and physiological markers such as HRV.

Requirements

enrollment in a Bachelor or Master program in Psychology or related fields

interest in animal assisted work with horses and dogs, somatic approaches and personal development

openness to interdisciplinary and innovative methods

ability to work independently and collaboratively

very good English skills, as English is the working language of the internship

Application

Please send your application including:

- CV
- current study program
- preferred internship period
- a short motivation statement

to: elisabeth.koestner.13@gmail.com

Social Links:

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/elisabeth-karoline-anna-köstner-831b582b0>

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YouTube: https://youtube.com/@equibalance_therapy